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By Joseph Lelyveld

FOR THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency and its frequently embattled leader, William J. Casey, the start of the second Reagan Administration is more than just the halfway mark in a marathon. Ronald Reagan is the first President in 12 years to take the oath of office for a second time, but it has been 16 years since a head of the American intelligence community last managed to continue in office from one Presidential term to the next. On the previous occasion, in 1969, Richard M. Nixon reluctantly gave in to an argument that he should retain Richard M. Helms as Director of Central Intelligence in order to safeguard the nonpartisan character of the office. There have been five directors since, and Casey — whom no one has ever called nonpartisan — has now survived longest of them all.

The Director: Running The C.I.A.

This can be regarded as a footnote, a fluke, or an indication that the C.I.A. has essentially weathered the investigations and strictures of the 1970's, that it has recovered much of its old effectiveness and mystique. The present director, who would naturally favor the latter interpretation, has tried to function as if it were so, casting himself in the mold of Allen W. Dulles and John A. McCone, who flourished in the 1950's and early 60's, before serious questions had been raised, on either moral or pragmatic grounds, about covert action on a global scale. Like them, rather than like his immediate predecessors, he has been recognized in Washington and beyond for having ready access to the President. Like them, he has not hesitated to make his voice heard at the White House on policy matters as distinct from intelligence evaluations. (Indeed, he might even be said to have surpassed them in this respect, for, serving a President who values the Cabinet as a forum, he has managed to become the first Director

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of Central Intelligence ever to sit at the table as a participating Cabinet member.) And like Dulles in particular — fondly known to his subordinates as "the great white case officer" because of his consuming passion for espionage and related games — Mr. Casey is believed to have immersed himself deeply in the day-to-day management of clandestine operations.

Yet for an assortment of reasons — some personal, others having to do with changing times and changed expectations of a director — no one would suggest that official Washington has learned to view William Casey as a permanent fixture or regard him with anything approaching the awe his seemingly legendary predecessors inspired. Instead, the Administration's second-ranking septuagenarian — he will turn 72 on March 13 — seems to attract caricaturists, starting with Herblock, whose cartoons routinely show the man who is supposed to be the President's eyes and ears groping around with a paper bag over his head.

On Capitol Hill, he becomes the object of another kind of caricature. Liberal members of the two Congressional intelligence committees charged with oversight of his shadowy domain tend to isolate two items on his lengthy and diverse curriculum vitae — his role more than half a lifetime ago in World War II running spy rings from London for the Office of Strategic Services and his later career in New York as a tax lawyer; in their view, he is a cagey old man with an eye for legal loopholes who is romantically and recklessly bent on reliving his youth.

Conservative members, who can be nearly as harsh, tend to portray him as the opposite of an activist director: that is, as a captive of a Langley bureaucracy whose major objective, it is alleged, is to shield itself from controversy. The two images overlap, in that neither takes him very seriously as an effective Director of Central Intelligence or an influence on policy, either broadly on matters of national security or narrowly on matters specific to the intelligence community.

What is involved here is more than a clash of perceptions about Casey. It is also a clash of perceptions about what a Director of Central Intelligence should be and, beyond that, about how ready the United States should be to intervene secretly — politically and, especially, militarily — in the affairs of other countries. On both sides — those who think this director is too active and those who think he is not nearly active enough — there is a tendency to forget the fundamental insight that emerged from the investigations of the 1970's: that all directors, finally, are creatures of

the Presidents they serve. If Presidents hear intelligence about the world that conflicts with what they would rather believe, they have the option of setting it aside. But no director can ignore the President's goals. The different ways directors interpret their jobs reflect differences among the Presidents who picked them.

The point needs to be underscored again today because the deepening debate over the proper role of a Director of Central Intelligence, provoked by Casey's active involvement in the policy making of the Reagan Administration, merges inevitably with the debate over support for the anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua. And this quickly merges into the more theological debate, familiar from Vietnam days, as to whether the United States can afford to "abandon" the side it has chosen in a regional conflict.

WHEN C.I.A. VETERANS RATE past directors, they sometimes dwell on the way they balanced their several functions. For instance, Phillips is

said to have neglected his responsibility to coordinate the intelligence community; McCone is supposed to have managed it brilliantly. Helms is credited with keeping the agency's analysis straight and well focused, especially with regard to Vietnam. George Bush soothed Congress and restored morale, without ever delving very deeply into the details of clandestine operations, which appear to have reached their lowest ebb during his year at Langley. Adm. Stansfield Turner, like the former naval engineer he served, was fascinated by the advances in technological means of intelligence gathering.

But what the veterans seem to look for first when they are measuring their directors is the degree of access to the Presidents they served. Nothing, after all, is more costly or of less value than intelligence that goes nowhere.

Like medieval courtiers, some directors have resorted to guile, dropping in on a chief executive when he was about to take a nap, studying his schedule so as to run into him on his

way back to the Oval Office at the end of a public function, or suddenly appearing on a Saturday morning when defenses raised by the White House staff might be slightly lowered.

With Dulles, access was fraternal, through his brother, John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State. McCone, who became close to the Kennedys, knew that his time to resign had come when Lyndon B. Johnson took to making him wait in an anteroom. Johnson made Helms a regular at his "Tuesday lunches," which were seldom on Tuesdays, but Nixon first wanted to exclude him altogether from National Security Council meetings and then decreed that his Director of Central Intelligence would have to leave the room before any policy matters were discussed. (In practice, says Helms, taking issue with Henry Kissinger's memoirs, he always stayed.)

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In a tone that sounds boastful, Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser under Jimmy Carter, notes in his memoirs that Admiral Turner had "practically no one-on-one meetings" with President Carter and "all C.I.A. reporting was funneled to the President through me." The admiral insists that this is simply not so, that he saw the President alone when he needed to. But his regularly scheduled briefing sessions for the President declined from twice to once a week and then to once every two weeks. As his own and the President's command of intelligence increased, he ranged further afield for compelling subjects for the briefings until once, so the story goes at Langley, he showed up with charts of Moscow sewer tunnels. "Never happened," says Turner. But the story lives on to show what directors will do for access.

By contrast, Ronald Reagan tried to get to William Casey before William Casey ever tried to get to him. The Californian was the third Republican Presidential hopeful to phone Casey at his New York law office in 1979 to seek support. In the first two cases, those of John B. Connally and George Bush, the callers got good wishes and checks of \$1,000. In Reagan's case, a real conversation developed, leading to breakfast and a commitment. But the two men didn't get to know each other well until after the New Hampshire primary, when the conservative Easterner was suddenly called on to take charge of the campaign. The rapport established then was founded, first of all, on the campaign's success. "Casey's not his pal," explained an old New York friend of the director. "Reagan thinks Casey is a damn smart guy who elected him. It's the way an actor feels about his agent. This is his agent — he has got to believe the guy is good."

An Administration official, attempting to interpret the President's attitude toward Casey, said it was obviously one of fondness: "He's a wily old guy, tough as all get out, which the President likes." Whatever the feeling, it appears to translate into job security. It is also as apparent as such things ever are that the relationship between the Director of Central Intelligence and the White House staff was not one of mutual admiration so long as James A. Baker 3d, who will now get his mail next door at the Treasury, was its chief. Asked to explain Casey's staying power, a former official commented, "He was one of the first to realize the importance of Nancy Reagan."

The degree to which staying power translates into influence is harder to assess. Mr. Casey's private com-

munications with the President appear to be mostly on the telephone. He can see the President alone when he feels he needs to do so, officials acknowledge, but such private meetings don't often occur. Influence can be measured in various ways, but for the C.I.A., the value of a "political" director with unquestioned White House access can be measured first of all in dollars; in the 50 percent increase in appropriations that accrued to the C.I.A. in the first three Reagan budgets. Moreover, a senior official at the agency asserted, the fact that he is presumed to have direct access to the President is translated into enhanced access and influence for the agency at all levels of government. "Poor Stan Turner had to scheme and maneuver to get in to see the President," he said. "His lack of access and lack of clout communicated itself from the very top to the very bottom. It is just the obverse with Casey. We just don't

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have trouble getting in to see people."

But with the advent of Congressional oversight, access at the White House is no longer enough to insure a director's effectiveness. In the days of Dulles and McCone, a director who was known to have the President's confidence could handle his Congressional relations by dealing confidentially with leaders of both houses and key committee chairmen; less by persuading than allowing them to peer into his hidden world. Today a director who is known to have easier access to the President than any other director in at least 20 years, and who is presumed to be more influential, has worse Congressional relations than any of his 12 predecessors. This could have happened only in an era in which the Director of Central Intelligence is expected to be accountable not only to the President but to the oversight committees; and expected, as is now apparently the case in the Reagan Administration, to win the backing of those committees for policies that are inherently controversial — notably support for anti-Sandinista Contras in Nicaragua.

A veteran of many C.I.A. covert-action campaigns, now retired from the agency but still jealous of his anonymity, as are most former agents, observed that Casey has been expected to serve as a political point man in Congress, not only allaying doubts, but also taking whatever fire the Nicaraguan involvement draws. This insight appeared to be validated when an Administration official, offering what he said was a White House perspective on Casey's stew-

ardship of the C.I.A., emphasized first the need "to achieve Congressional backing" for Presidential policies, especially in Central America. Choosing his words carefully, the official dryly termed this "an unachieved goal." The pressure of Congressional oversight, in other words, has helped make the job of Director of Central Intelligence what it was never supposed to be in the past — a political job. So the job that once involved the balancing of only three distinct responsibilities — serving as the President's intelligence adviser, managing the intelligence community and running the C.I.A. in its various analytical and espionage components — can now be said to involve a fourth, that of Congressional liaison on behalf of Presidential policies that may or may not be publicly acknowledged.

CASEY IS OBVIOUSLY a political man. But he seems to be singularly ill equipped for the sort of political role in which he will be cast in the coming weeks, when he seeks to persuade the oversight committees to remove the freeze that has held up funds for the not-so-secret war in Central America. The arts of advocacy and persuasion are not his forte. In private conversation, he tends to avert his gaze as if he were speaking to someone behind him and to swallow the last words of his sentences as he moves on impatiently to his next thought. The mumbling, combined with an instinctive guardedness, can leave an impression that he is being evasive even when he is speaking with notable candor.

The upshot is that he is criticized for being "too political" and not being political enough, for "politicizing" intelligence and being politically ineffective. But that, too, may say something about built-in conflicts and contradictions of the job, which were already a cause for concern before salesmanship was added to the list of the director's responsibilities. Insiders scoffed when stationery was printed for Admiral Turner describing him as the Director of the C.I.A.; strictly speaking, in terms of the National Security Act of 1947, which established the C.I.A., there is no such position. The title, Director of Central Intelligence, refers to more than just the agency. The director is also supposed to coordinate the activities of the Pentagon-based National Security Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency and to funnel objective intelligence to the White House. If he is actively running one agency, it was asked, how can he keep from favoring its estimates and defending its operations?

CHARLES ROSS/AVI/IN/PICTURES

Thus the concern that a Director of Central Intelligence might function as an advocate of policies was evident even before Congressional oversight helped to make advocacy one of his tasks. The traditional idea was that the President's intelligence adviser had to be aloof from party and competing factional interests within an administration. Five of the first seven directors were military officers. President John F. Kennedy made a point of retaining Dulles from a Republican administration and, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, replaced him with a conservative Republican, McCone. The quintessential career man and insider, Richard Helms, survived the transition from the Johnson Administration to the Nixon Administration. But since oversight became a recognized fact of life, each new President has been more concerned to have someone he regarded as politically dependable in the job than to uphold the idea that it had to be kept above politics.

The turning point came when George Bush, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee and Congressman, was chosen by Gerald R. Ford to replace William E. Colby, the last intelligence professional to hold the job. Colby, who was blamed by Kissinger and others in the Ford Administration for being too candid with Congressional panels then investigating the agency, now argues that the agency functions best when run by a political man who has the President's confidence. Admiral Turner, who did not fit that bill, was a second choice for Jimmy Carter after his more obviously political choice of Theodore C. Sorensen met Congressional resistance. The admiral may not have been a political man, but he was an outsider at Langley who shared his President's initial skepticism about covert action as an instrument of policy. Jimmy Carter, so he later told Admiral Turner, got the distinct impression that George Bush was eager to be retained in a Demo-

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cratic Administration (a spokesman for the Vice President says he was merely offering to stay on for several months) and the admiral frankly acknowledges that he was ready to serve President Reagan. But no new President, it now seems, wants a used Director of Central Intelligence.

THE DIFFERENCE with Casey is not that he is a "political" choice, but that he is the political choice of an Administration that consciously wanted to restore the capacity of the C.I.A. for political and military action in foreign countries. His critics have seldom acknowledged that his claim on the job went beyond political obligation. Yet in terms of qualities of mind as well as experience in government, his credentials were at least as conspicuous as those of his immediate two predecessors. In a sense, he has

PETE SOUZA/THE WHITE HOUSE

been in the intelligence game most of his life. His first job after law school was with the Research Institute of America, a private concern that made its mark prognosticating on the New Deal and its laws for business subscribers. The institute's founder, Leo Cherne, found the young lawyer to be extremely conservative — pro-Franco in the civil war then raging in Spain — but also indispensable, for he had a knack, almost a genius, for marshaling and analyzing facts. Later he set himself up as a competitor in the business of packaging business intelligence.

He made his first fortune there, processing huge amounts of legal and economic information for corporate subscribers and leaving his name on more than two dozen books. He made most of his subsequent fortunes as a venture capitalist, staying alert to new markets, processes and trends. Kissinger wrote of Helms, "He understood that in Washington knowledge was power." That was something Casey already appears to have known when he first went to Washington — in 1941.

In 1968, the Nixon transition team sounded him out on going to Langley as deputy director to Helms, with whom he had roomed for a couple of months in an apartment on Grosvenor Street in London, in their O.S.S. salad days. But not liking the sound of the word deputy, he chose to remain in private life until 1971, when he became chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Then, having surprised many by proving to be an activist and reforming chairman, he moved to the State Department as under secretary for economic affairs, a job in which he became restless soon after Kissinger became Secretary of State.

The job of Director of Central Intelligence, his old boss Leo Cherne remarked, is the first job he has ever had in which he is unlikely to become restless. Obviously, he loves the role, signing the initial "C" to the memos that go rocketing around the Langley headquarters, in what, as an old intelligence buff, he must know is a copy of the eponymous signature of the head of the British M.I. 6 (changed to "M" in the James Bond novels).

It may not be demonstrable that he has "the best mind in Washington, in or out of the Administration," as an official on the National Intelligence Council claimed, with a

devotion to his chief that seems far beyond the call of duty. But it is a more interesting and better stocked mind than the one described by Congressmen and their aides after they had heard him mumble his way through seemingly evasive testimony in closed sessions of their committees. Casey is the Reagan Administration's bibliophile, a voracious and eclectic speed reader with surprising range. His reading during the last Christmas season included a book by a Yale Sinologist about a 16th-century Jesuit in China, "The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci" by Jonathan D. Spence. When friends search for an anecdote, it usually involves his dropping a prodigious sum in a very short time at a bookshop or airport newsstand.

He had started gravitating back toward the intelligence field even before he showed up in Reagan's political tent as a relative latecomer in 1979. In the mid-70's, he chaired the subcommittee on intelligence for a Presidential commission; and Ford — whom he supported against the Reagan challenge in 1976 — named him to the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which functions as a board of directors to the intelligence community.

But the idea that he ever saw his alumnus status in the O.S.S. as a qualification for the top job at Langley quickly gets brushed aside. "That's so superficial," he grumbled in the course of a long breakfast interview at his Washington residence in a rich man's housing development on the edge of the old Nelson A. Rockefeller estate. "What I am doing now bears no relation to what we were doing then. All we could do was pop a guy into Germany with a radio and hope to hear from him."

THE OPEN DEBATE in the 1970's on the proper role of the C.I.A. more or less faded from public view once the Senate Select Committee headed by the late Frank Church published its conclusions about covert action, domestic surveillance and Congressional oversight. The committee said it had considered seeking "a total ban on all forms of covert action," but concluded that the capacity to intervene secretly in the affairs of other countries should be retained for use in cases in which it was "absolutely essential to the na-

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tional security." Even then, it declared, clandestine actions must "in no case" be incompatible with American principles.

The committee's findings may have implied a consensus, but beyond the question of assassination — that, all sides seemed to concede, was naughty — there was no consensus on the meaning of terms such as "absolutely essential," especially where the contemplated actions involved paramilitary force. The debate continued, usually behind closed doors, as a matter for specialists with security clearances — Congressional aides who devoted their careers to drafting or resisting legislated guidelines for the C.I.A. that were finally shelved in 1980, or academics who tried to study the intelligence establishment from the outside. By the end of the Carter years — following the fall of Iran's Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan — the focus of the debate shifted from the questions of what the C.I.A. should be allowed to do and how it should be restrained to how the intelligence agencies could be strengthened and made more effective.

The Carter Administration resolved to keep itself to the "absolutely essential" standard but took a deliberate decision in its first year to preserve the capacity of the C.I.A. to involve itself in insurgent struggles around the world, on the side of friendly regimes or in opposition to hostile ones. (On a highly secret basis, it even created a parallel capability in the Pentagon.) The Reagan Administration, recoiling from the soul-searching of the 70's, was more disposed to put these capabilities to work.

The contrasting attitudes were reflected in the last two Directors of Central Intelligence. In obvious respects, Casey can be presented as an antithesis of Turner. The admiral, who had to fight for entrance at the Carter White House, religiously stayed out of policy debates. At Langley, his first aim was to impose command and control over the clandestine services. Casey disdained bureaucratic boundaries; if necessary, he was reported to have said once, he could ask other aides to leave the room so he could speak to the President in confidence. He spoke of restoring the C.I.A., not of dominating it; and, with no more qualifications than Allen Dulles would have found necessary, he saw most third-world struggles as bat-

ties in a single secret war. "You have to be prudent and careful about these things," he observed in the interview at his home, speaking of third-world conflicts, "but if you're living in a world where the Soviets and their allies are free to get involved in these things with impunity, and people who share our values and our notions of freedom don't respond, then you lose."

Yet there is less antithesis and more continuity between the Turner and Casey eras at the C.I.A. than meets the eye. The revival to which Mr. Casey likes to call attention really started under his predecessor, propelled in part by Carter's growing dissatisfaction with the quality of the political intelligence he was getting and by Congressional concern that funds for the agency had been held down too severely in the 70's. By the end of the Turner period at the C.I.A., according to a former senior intelligence figure, the number of authorized covert actions was at a higher level than at any time since Kennedy, when covert operations were at their peak. According to a Reagan official, the total of formal "Presidential findings" — the highly classified statements that a President is now required by law to sign and pass on to the oversight committees when a new operation has been authorized — actually declined in Reagan's first term. Jimmy Carter signed nearly two such "findings" to every one signed by his successor, this source said.

The comparison provokes outrage from former Carter officials, who argue that it measures the literalness with which each administration interpreted its legal responsibility to frame new "findings," not the scope or cost of the operations. Admiral Turner, who still lives near the Potomac, about three minutes' drive from his former Langley headquarters, is especially rolled by suggestions that the paramilitary involvement in Nicaragua was actually initiated on his watch.

There was, however, a Carter "finding" on Nicaragua that, according to Senator Malcolm Wallop, the very conservative Wyoming Republican who served on the Senate Intelligence Committee until this month, explicitly declared an intention to "change the nature" of the Sandinista regime. The program was intended to support "pluralistic" tendencies in

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trade unions, the press and the countryside, a former national security official declared. Another former official familiar with details of the program as it evolved in both Administrations maintained that the Carter effort was really "small and inept" and, moreover, that it backfired because it gave hardliners in the Managua Government an excuse to eliminate precisely those elements the Americans had been seeking to promote. Nevertheless, the Reagan Administration was able to rely on the Carter "finding" for nearly a year, expanding a program that was already in place, as it was doing simultaneously in Afghanistan. The initial impetus for assistance to the Contras, according to an official who was present at some of the discussions, came from the State Department and Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., who stipulated only that the aid be channeled through a third party, which turned out to be the military government then ruling in Argentina. Later, another official asserted, it was also State that "tasked" the mining of the harbor at Corinto.

Commenting from the sidelines, a former Latin American station chief for the C.I.A. with an extensive background in covert operations said the choice of the Argentines revealed a fatal ideological blindness; to protect the Contras from the charge that they were puppets of the Yankee imperialists, Washington needed to gain the support of more reputable regimes closer to Central America, he argued. With a well-honed sense of paradox, which seems to be a byproduct of clandestine work, the former station chief listed three qualities that he said were essential in a Director of Central Intelligence — "ruthlessness, duplicity and absolute integrity." The first two were essential for the running of covert operations, he said; the last for insuring that the national interest was not narrowly conceived or damaged in the process. Ruthlessness and duplicity might have argued for a Contra program, he implied; "absolute integrity" would have excluded the Argentine junta.

ANY DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE process and influence has an undeniable bureaucratic value for his agency, but there remains the perennial question of whether he should have any role in an Administration's inner policy

debates. Helms says that he conceived his role under Presidents Johnson and Nixon to be "one man who helped to keep the game honest," providing information that bore on policy debates without taking sides or advocating a position himself. Obviously, it was a delicate line to walk, because information thus provided could tip the scales.

Turner committed himself on a policy question only once in four years, allowing himself to speak against the MX missile at a National Security Council meeting. He did so, he explains, after President Carter summed up the discussion by saying he concluded that everyone at the table favored deployment. By contrast, accounts of factional tugs of war over issues and personnel at the Reagan White House routinely mention the Director of Central Intelligence.

The current director does not seek to deny that he gets into policy discussions in the Cabinet. "I think I'm a player," he acknowledged guardedly, speaking of domestic issues, "but I don't get much involved." Offering an example, he said he might

say something if an issue of economic policy came up on which he felt he had some background. On national security issues, he went on, he is "pretty careful" about the distinction between intelligence and policy, trying not to express an opinion unless he is asked to do so. "I recognize the distinction," the director declared. Whether those who are at the table find it as easy to recognize the distinction between intelligence and opinion when this director speaks is a question that few individuals who are not on the National Security Council can usefully discuss. But it goes to the heart of the question of how well President Reagan is being served by his principal intelligence adviser.

Conservative as he is — "he is more conservative than Reagan" in his instinctive reactions on issues, according to a former official — he is no diehard. He urged his candidate in 1980 not to repeat the fatal error he thought Gerald Ford had made four years earlier in failing to put his chief rival for the nomination, Reagan, on his ticket. Campaign manager Casey promoted the choice of

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George Bush and brought James Baker, the Bush campaign manager and later the White House chief of staff, into his own operation. Going further back, the conservative Casey couldn't bring himself to work for Barry Goldwater in 1964, not for any ideological reasons, but because he thought the Arizona was a sure loser.

Casey's conservative critics, who had an agenda for the C.I.A. they assumed he shared, find a worrisome reflection of this pragmatic tendency in his readiness to make his senior appointments at Langley from within the agency; the effect, it is argued, is to reinforce bureaucratic caution. A recent report by the Heritage Foundation urged President Reagan to "improve intelligence leadership by appointing to top intelligence positions highly qualified individuals" who share his goals. "He simply hasn't cleared the deck and put officers on deck who believe in where he's going," Senator Wallop said of Casey.

What is in question is a director's ability to dominate the institution he is supposed to head. Turner tried, imposing what he regarded as man-

agement controls on the clandestine service, eliminating 820 jobs at a stroke. By contrast, the common denominator among Casey's key aides is that they rose to prominence in the Turner years. Robert M. Gates, the deputy director for intelligence — the official who oversees the production of the intelligence studies that circulate among policy makers — served successively as a staff assistant in the last Administration to David Aaron and Brzezinski at the National Security Council and, finally, to Turner.

John N. McMahon, the deputy director of Central Intelligence and thus the highest-ranking intelligence professional, is a veteran of 33 years at the agency, the last 28 at Langley. Under Turner, McMahon became deputy director for operations although he had never served in the clandestine service. A generalist with intimate knowledge of the agency's inner workings, he is popular with the oversight committees. But he would be first to go in an ideological purge of those who are suspected by conservatives of not sharing their goals.

Those who worry about the agency's will and effectiveness believe that the investigations and reforms of the 70's weakened it in three crucial areas.

First, in what are supposed to be its clandestine services, the agency has allowed itself, they say, to become excessively reliant on official "cover" in American diplomatic missions abroad; the use of nonofficial cover — recruitment of agents among journalists, churchmen, scholars and businessmen — was repeatedly "blown" in the investigations.

Second, it is alleged to have become similarly complacent about counterintelligence, the effort to protect itself from penetration by foreign agents.

Third, the elaborate process of preparing national intelligence "estimates" came under attack for submerging conflicting evidence and dissenting viewpoints.

Looking down from his perch on top of the whole secret apparatus, the director contemptuously rejects the argument that the C.I.A. has withstood the pressure to shape up. Asked what his biggest surprise was in four

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years at Langley, he spoke of the caliber of the people he found there. "There's a lot of resurgence in this group of people," he said. "It's the most effective apparatus in the American Government — by a long shot."

An outsider trying to assess the performance of the intelligence community during the tenure of any given director is like the blind man trying to identify the elephant. It's in the nature of the beast that officials cannot provide evidence of their successes in acquiring agents in a rival service or government, penetrating terrorist groups or intercepting sensitive military transmissions. As far as any outsider can tell, the United States is no better able today to predict or influence the actions of Islamic factions in Teheran or Beirut than it was four years ago. But then no outsider could know.

The Casey years, it is said, have seen an intensification in the C.I.A. of efforts to counter terrorism and the drug traffic. Maybe so, but exactly the same claims were made when Bush and Turner were directors. Presumably they reflect a continuing effort. What they say about the impact of a given director is harder to assess.

Clearly, with the major increase in appropriations, out-

put of long-term and short-term intelligence has been stepped up dramatically. More than 50 national "estimates" were prepared last year, the present director likes to point out, compared to only 12 in the last year of the Carter Administration.

But does increased quantity insure increased quality? On this score, recent members of the Senate Intelligence Committee — from Senator Wallop on the far right to Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who has been a consistent Casey critic — seem willing to give the director benefit of the doubt, acknowledging an improvement in the clarity and rigor of the agency's studies. Others with the security clearances that are a prerequisite for judgment say the improvement has been marginal; that while more questions are asked of the intelligence establishment, those supplying the answers are often limited in their exposure to the countries about which they are expected to prophesy; frequently, it is said, they don't read or speak the relevant languages.

Already in 1976 the Church committee was worrying about the problem of "overload." The analysts were swamped with intelligence

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data, it said, and they in turn were swamping the policy makers. "There is simply too much to read, from too many sources," the committee found. By the end of the Turner years, a high official said, few National Security Council officials had time to more than glance at the intelligence studies piling up on their desks. Still it is a Stakhanovite boast that the output has been raised.

Casey's involvement in the policy game provokes dark suspicions about his involvement in the analysis process, as if that were not an essential role of a Director of Central Intelligence. The issue arose most recently with the resignation of the national intelligence officer for Latin America on the ground that the director had forced a change in the conclusion of an "estimate" on Mexico in order to magnify the possibility of instability south of the border and thus, it was implied, advance a Central American domino theory as justifica-

tion for support to the rebels in Nicaragua.

William Colby, defending Mr. Casey's prerogative, noted that national "estimates" go forward over the signature of the Director of Central Intelligence, that it is formally his estimate; he had changed them himself, the former director said.

The case drew sufficient attention on Capitol Hill for Casey to authorize his analysis chief, Robert Gates, to take to the public prints with an article defending the integrity of the process. In the article, the career man points out that he, rather than the director, is "the final approving official" on the current intelligence that goes on a daily basis to the President. Never before had public assurances had to be offered that a director of Central Intelligence did not meddle in the process.

On other issues, outside Central America, the C.I.A. has shown in the Casey period an ability to furnish intelligence estimates that cut

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across the policy-making grain. For instance, it told the Reagan White House that its effort to organize a boycott by Western suppliers to the Siberian pipeline wouldn't work. Casey, a former official said, characteristically jumps to congenial ideological conclusions on issues. "But," he went on, "Casey absorbs and responds to evidence very quickly; he does not discard evidence which does not support his predetermined point of view; he assimilates it."

Yet this director's bias, as a former venture capitalist and sometime policy maker, is clearly in favor of action. Reminiscing in a speech about his O.S.S. boss, William J. Donovan, he recalled his "bouncing into London, with little or no notice, brimful of new ideas, ready to approve any operation that had half a chance." This fond portrait was drawn long before he became Director of Central Intelligence himself, but it probably came close to describing the sort of intelligence chief he dreamed of being.

He himself was on the move, as much as any director since Allen Dulles. He says he is out of the country no more than 10 percent of the time and that, scheduling his trips so he can take in five or six countries over two weekends and one working week, he seldom is away from Washington more than 10 days at a time. The trips have enabled him to stay in touch with intelligence chiefs in the 15 to 20 countries that have been involved themselves in

supporting purportedly anti-Communist insurgencies. "More than a quarter of a million people have taken up arms against Communist oppression," the director said in a speech last October, referring to Angola, Cambodia and Ethiopia as well as Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

At both ends of the political spectrum there is the complaint that covert action is used as a substitute for policy — the reflection of an urge to "do something" — rather than as an extension of policy. The Heritage Foundation report complained that covert action objectives in Afghanistan and Nicaragua were "vague and ill defined," then added four other countries to the director's implied hit list — Iran, Libya, Laos and Vietnam — as desirable paramilitary targets for 1985.

One of the Church committee's strongest proposals for restraint in covert action was that all schemes be reviewed at a high level in the National Security Council. In the Reagan Administration, covert action proposals are reviewed at a higher level than ever before, in a body called the National Security Planning Group that normally includes the President, Vice President, Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. The participants meet without their aides, according to a former high official. Sometimes the studies are undertaken at Langley only after the program has been approved. By then a task force may already be in motion.

The high-level group thus

functions less as a filter, as the Church committee envisioned, and more as a strategy session in which the search for ways to act effectively in support of what are deemed to be pressing national interests takes priority. Casey may be doubly tied to Nicaragua and other covert action programs, as a policy maker as well as the official responsible for carrying out the programs. But a nonpartisan director who was ordered to initiate an operation would still be tied. And the political managers in the White House would still want him to make the case for the involvement to the oversight committees. There, insofar as it lacked bipartisan support, it would still make the C.I.A. a target of mistrust and controversy. "An ideological regime may revel in exotic covert intelligence operations, encourage them and still keep intelligence evaluations at arms length," a former chief of Israeli military intelligence, Yehoshafat Harkabi, notes in an article in The Jerusalem Quarterly that recently was circulated among top intelligence officials at Langley. "Good intelligence," the Israeli warned, "is no guarantee of good policy and vice versa." Nevertheless, forgetting that it was not Casey who signed the secret Presidential "finding" authorizing support for the Contras, the members of the oversight committees appear to hanker for a nonpartisan Director of Central Intelligence, an intelligence professional — someone, after all, like Helms, as if that

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would be enough to produce a consensus on covert action.

The 1976 Church committee concluded its remarks on the role of the Director of Central Intelligence by suggesting that Congress might want to pass legislation to relieve the President's principal intelligence adviser of his executive responsibility over the C.I.A., thus removing him from the sphere of operations. This would have the advantage, the report argued, of eliminating the conflicts of interest that might bias him in favor of the C.I.A. in the inter-agency competition or tempt him to justify operations on which the agency was embarked. Besides, the committee worried, the job might be too big for any man.

As a possible solution, it advanced the idea of establishing a director of national intelligence in the White House to advise the President and, simultaneously, allocate tasks and funds to the various agencies. There would then be a director of the Central Intelligence Agency, responsible for the C.I.A. only. Although it continued to be discussed in the Carter years, it was an idea whose time had not come, partly because Turner's interpretation of the responsibilities of a director of national intelligence was so all-encompassing that it scared off many of the idea's original adherents, and partly because the pendulum was already swinging back on covert action. Others have suggested that the Pentagon could take over the C.I.A.'s paramilitary functions, to protect the agency from controversy and enable it to concentrate in secrecy on espionage and analysis, its main tasks.

But William Casey doesn't buy the idea that his job is too big. In his first year and a half at Langley, he worked out a division of turf and labors with his first deputy, Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, in which he ran the clandestine service, supervised analysis and advised the President, leaving his other administrative tasks in the agency and the intelligence community to the Admiral. Now, he says, he is much more active on community matters.

"I feel that I'm leading and I feel that I'm on top of all facets of the job," he says. "I have a capacity to size up a situation once I get the facts and to make decisions, and I've been able to get into all phases of the work. For 10 years there hasn't been anyone here long enough to do that." ■



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THE K.G.B.'s Viktor M. Chebrikov, head of the principal Soviet intelligence agency.



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